GOOD GOVERNANCE PRACTICES IN MALAYSIA: THE ROLES OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract:

Good governance is essential for Malaysia's prosperity. For Malaysia to be successful in achieving its objectives, it requires an intricate strategy. Malaysia should adopt digitalization initiatives like developed nations to improve governance. For the purpose of enhancing productivity, economic growth, and the quality of government services, Malaysia has aggressively implemented digitalization across a variety of sectors. However, even when compared to the results of other developing countries, the results of the good governance index are unsatisfactory. During the past ten years, there has been some progress made, but it is not sufficient. With the intention of bolstering the digital economy, Malaysia launched MyDigital 2021-2030. In order to achieve national prosperity, initiatives pertaining to digital transformation ought to incorporate all of the principles of good governance. When incorporating each principle into digitalization initiatives, it is necessary to ensure that Systems Theory is taken into consideration. In order to achieve good governance, digital technologies that are based on systems theory present challenges. Concerns of significant importance include the digital divide, cybersecurity, literacy, interoperability, and all aspects of data integration. Collaboration between government agencies, civil society organisations, and the private sector is required in order to digitalize good governance in Malaysia. This is necessary in order to address issues and challenges. The evaluation of the outcomes of digital governance projects also requires the implementation of systems that provide continuous monitoring, assessment, and feedback in order to guarantee the projects' long-term viability and operational efficiency. It is

possible that Malaysia will fall behind other developing countries if it does not exploit the opportunities presented by the digital transformation.

Introduction

Developed countries use good governance as a means of advancing both national and societal prosperity (Khouya & Benabdelhadi, 2020). For developing countries like Malaysia, good governance practices are crucial because they raise the country's profile abroad, attract foreign investment, promote economic growth, reduce corruption, improve public service delivery, and ensure accountability and transparency in government.

Over the years, Malaysia has continued in giving priority to digitalization initiatives to harness digital technologies to drive socio-economic development, improve public services, and enhance governance (Abu Jaish et al., 2023). The digitalization efforts in Malaysia can be traced back to the early 1990s when the government launched various initiatives to promote the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the country. In 2021, Malaysia has launched a digitalization framework known as the National Digital Blueprint 2021-2030 (INTAN Official Portal - MyDigital, n.d.). The blue print, which is based on digital transformation, is a national initiative that represents the government's goals of making Malaysia a high-income, digitally-driven country that leads the region in the digital economy. Nonetheless, the focus of the transformation currently is on economic development.

To the benefit of the nation and its citizens as a whole, Malaysia should utilise the digitization transformation to incorporate every principle of good governance. However, since the transformation involves a variety of stakeholders at different levels and purposes, there are issues and challenges when applying those good governance principles. Thus, to aid in the transition, a suitable management theory like System Theory (Friedman & Allen, n.d.) can be adapted. A well-thought-out strategy should also be taken into account such by examine projects that are applicable which developed countries have implemented.

Digitalisation Projects in Malaysia

Over the years, Malaysia has continued in giving priority to digitalization initiatives through a range of policies, strategies, and programmes designed to harness technology to promote economic growth, expand connectivity, improve service delivery, and empower its citizens with digital skills. A number of digitalised projects has been launched to harnessing digital technologies to drive socio-economic development, improve public services, and enhance governance.

The Digital Free Trade Zone (DFTZ) is an example of digitalisation project to promote business in Malaysia. In order to foster digital trade and e-commerce both domestically and throughout Southeast Asia, this strategic project was started in 2017 (Chan et al., 2021). Through the use of digital platforms and technology, the DFTZ makes it easier for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Malaysia to access foreign markets and reach a worldwide

audience. All things considered, the DFTZ project in Malaysia acts as a stimulant for the expansion of e-commerce and digital transformation, making the nation a competitive force in the global economy.

On the other hand, e-Perolehan is a project mainly used by the government agencies. The Malaysian government formally introduced it as an electronic procurement system in 2000 with the goal of modernising and enhancing the effectiveness of government procurement procedures (Esa et al., 2013). Since its launch, e-Perolehan has significantly contributed to the digitization of procurement processes, improving accountability, efficiency, and transparency in Malaysian government procurement. Over time, the project has undergone constant updates and enhancements to accommodate the changing requirements of government agencies and companies involved in the procurement process.
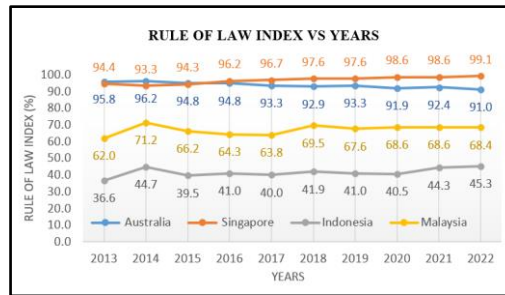
MySejahtera is an example project that was created primarily for Malaysian society. The project, a contact tracing tool designed to help monitor and contain the spread of COVID-19 in the nation, was started during the epidemic and supported by the Malaysian government in April 2020 (Chan et al., 2021). Together with several other governmental organisations and digital firms, the Malaysian Ministry of Health developed the project. A wide range of services, including health evaluation, symptom self-reporting, contact tracing, vaccine registration, and details on COVID-19 guidelines and updates, are offered to the society through the comprehensive digital portal MySejahtera.

Nonetheless, Malaysia has not seen as significant an impact on the attainment of good governance as developed nations have, despite recent advancements in digitization efforts that have provided digital platforms to various stakeholder levels. Thus, the MyDigital 2021–2030 blueprint needs to include all the principles good governance. Malaysia faces dire repercussions that could affect not just the nation's economy but also the prosperity of the country and society at large if it loses this opportunity.
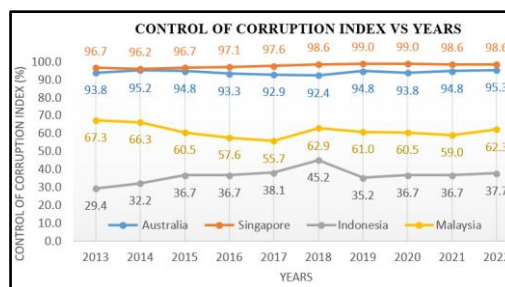
Malaysia Right Now Regarding Good Governance

Based on the global statistics, Malaysia achievements are still far behind the developed countries in terms good governance. For instance, data abstracted from the World Wide Governance Indicators demonstrates the performance of governance in Malaysia from 2013 to 2022 (Home Worldwide Governance Indicators, n.d.) is far behind to certain developed countries such as Australia and Singapore. Even among developing nations such as Indonesia, Malaysia seems lack of effort in enhancing good governance.

Figure 1 indicates that Malaysia has made a modest improvement in the rule of law. Percentile rank was 62.0% in 2013 and grew to 68.4% in 2022 respectively. A 6.4% rise in percentile rank was seen. Over 90% have been attained in developed nations like Singapore and Australia. Compared to Malaysia, Indonesia's percentile rank was lower. The percentile rank was 36.6% in 2013 and 45.3% in 2022, respectively. However, the improvement was 8.7%, slightly higher than Malaysia.

Figure 1: Rule of Laws Index Vs Years

When it comes to eliminating corruption, Australia and Singapore have outstanding records as shown by Figure 2. For the past ten years, both nations have routinely had percentile ranks of greater than 90%. Malaysia, however, has encountered certain challenges in its fight against corruption. While the percentile rank was 67.3% in 2013, it dropped to 62.2% in 2022. Even though the margin of 5.1% was small, it shows that Malaysia is not making headway in the fight against corruption. In contrast, Indonesia has made significant strides towards eliminating corruption, as seen by an 8.3% increase in the percentile rank. In 2013 it was 29.4%, and in 2022 it was 37.7%.

Figure 2: Control of Corruption Index Vs Years

According to Figure 3, Australia and Singapore have both attained percentile ranks in terms of regulatory quality that are higher than 95%. Malaysia also showed some signs of relative improvement; in 2013, the country's percentile rank was 68.2%; by 2022, it was 72.6%. Nevertheless, the 4.4% improvement was quite insignificant. Indonesia's regulatory quality was marginally worse than Malaysia's, which had a percentile rating of 47.4% in 2013 and 59.4% in 2022. However, the improvement over the previous ten years was 12%, far more than in Malaysia.
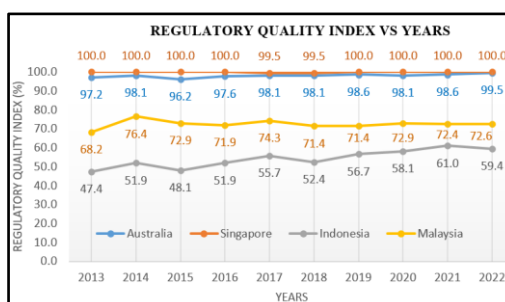

Figure 3: Regulatory Quality Index Vs Years

Figure 4 illustrates Malaysia's relatively good performance in terms of government effectiveness. The percentile rank was 78.7% in 2013 and 79.2% in 2022, although there was only a 5% improvement margin. Once more, Indonesia's regulatory quality was marginally worse than Malaysia's, with a percentile rating of 46.4% in 2013 and 66% in 2022. However, the improvement over the previous ten years was 19.6%, far more than in Malaysia. In terms of government effectiveness, Singapore and Australia have both attained percentile ranks of greater than 95%.
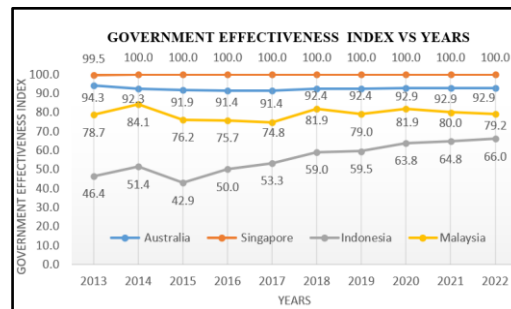

Figure 4: Government Effectiveness Index Vs Years

The accomplishments depicted in Figures 1 to 4 with regard to rule of law government, corruption, regulatory quality and effectiveness index suggest a degree of good governance. Over the past ten years, Malaysia has generally made considerable progress with the fight against corruption being an exception. Still, in comparison with other emerging nations like Indonesia, the accomplishment remained minimal. In order for Malaysia to become a successful country, a strategy must be put into place to bring the country closer to developed nations like Singapore and Australia. Enhancing the country's digitization initiatives to include all the principles of good governance is one strategy that can be used to help Malaysia. However, the inclusion should be based on a particular theory to ensure it success.

Good Governance, Systems Theory and Digital Transformation Relationship
Good governance is about the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels with special consideration for such good universal norms and practices (Li, 2020). The United Nations has outlined several principles of good governance as shown in Figure 5 (Good Governance: Definitions, 8 Characteristics, and Importance, n.d.). By adhering to these principles, states can promote peace, justice, and sustainable development as well as improve the efficiency, credibility, and reliability of their governing structures. Thus, by incorporating each these principles as the main trusts in Malaysia's digitalisation transformation, good governance practices can be achieved comprehensively.

Figure 5: Principles of Good Governance
Source: https://lotusarise.com/good-governance-upsc

Enhancing good governance through digitalisation transformation complement Systems Theory principles (Whitney et al., 2015). The theory stresses looking at systems as a whole rather than concentrating on their individual parts, as illustrated in Figure 6 by the oval that contains all of the elements inside it as well as the surrounding area. The theory also emphasises how interconnectedness systems are, as shown by the square and arrows, which have an effect on the system's output. The significance of feedback loops in preserving and enhancing system performance is also reflected by systems theory. Additionally, a system's ability to adapt to changes and uncertainties is made possible by feedback loops.
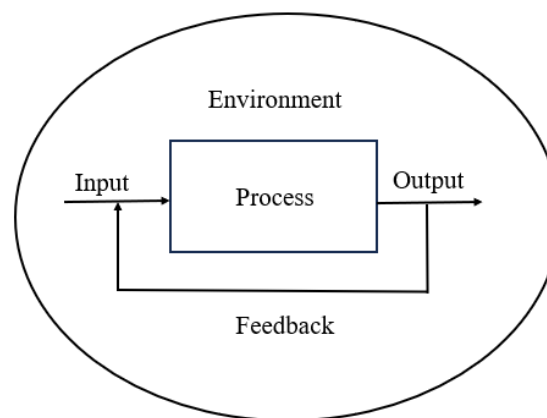

Figure 6: Components of Systems Theory
Adapted from: https://mundanopedia.com/business/organizational-Theory/systems-theory-of-management-organizations

Every good governance principle needs to be applied as recommended by Systems Theory in order to improve good governance practices. Digital transformation is a key tool that can help achieve this goal. This tool is essential because it gives every good governance principle a practical and efficient platform to be applied. Digital media, for instance, can readily reach a variety of stakeholders, from every person's mobile phone to the official digital platforms of government agencies. Most importantly, a vast amount of data can be effectively gathered, processed, and distributed.

Incorporating Good Governance Practices into Digital Transformation

Malaysia may improve its governance practices by utilising digital technologies and adopting digital transformation initiatives that align with the United Nations definition of good governance (Vymětal, 2008). The ambition of this article is not to provide a detailed overview of every project or advancement that must be integrated. Rather, the article's main goal is to emphasise how crucial it is that the nation's digitalization be founded on good governance principles by discussing some examples that being practised by developed nations. Mainly, the discussion will touch on principles related to participation, rule of law, effectiveness and efficiency.

Participation

The principle of participation in good governance is essential for fostering a sense of ownership, trust, and cooperation between governments and societies, ultimately leading to more effective and sustainable outcomes for a nation as a whole (Madhu, 2012). The digital transformation should take into account all good governance principles, including the participation principle, according to Systems Theory. The transformation based on theory also demonstrates how all parties involved are interconnected in realising the idea of wholeness.

In develop nations, there are various online platforms to link governments and societies that allow citizens to participate. As an example, Iceland has a consultation forum known as Better Reikjavik (Lackaff & Grimsson, 2014). As part of this online consultation forum, residents of Reykjavík are extended an invitation to express their thoughts and opinions on various matters concerning the operations and services that are offered by the municipalities. The open forum is accessible to people who have registered with the forum as well as visitors who have accepted the terms of participation for the forum. Users who have registered for the consultation forum participate in the forum by presenting their ideas, reading the ideas of other users, debating topics, giving their opinions, and rating arguments in favour of or against them.

Malaysia too should strengthen the principle of participation in good governance through nation digitalisation transformation. For instance, digital crowdsourcing platforms can be utilised to collect ideas and solutions from members of the community. This makes it possible for citizens to work together and co-create policies and programmes that are reflective of the requirements and preferences of the community. There are times when individuals who participate in crowdsourcing work as paid freelancers, while there are also times when they perform small tasks free of charge. This crowdsourcing platform is comparable to traffic apps such as Waze, which encourage drivers to self-report accidents and other incidents that occur on roadways in order to provide app users with information that is available in real time and is up to date.

The participation of individuals brings to light the intricate relationships and interactions that are involved in the implementation of good governance, and the digital transformation offers a methodical solution. By way of illustration, digital transformation has the potential to establish interconnectedness among all stakeholders. This can be accomplished by facilitating data integration, enabling real-time communication and collaboration, unifying systems and platforms, leveraging the Internet of Things (IOT) and smart devices, utilising cloud computing and digital platforms, and harnessing analytics and artificial intelligence (AI).

It is a fundamental component of good governance to encourage a sense of ownership, trust, and cooperation between governments and societies. This ultimately leads to outcomes that are more sustainable and successful for the nation as a whole after it has been implemented. Concurrently, the digital transformation establishes the interconnectedness of all of the stakeholders involved, which is essential in the process of materialising the principle of participation.

Rule of Law

The principle of the rule of law in good governance emphasizes that all individuals and institutions, including the government, are subject to and accountable under the law (Kamal & Mahmod, n.d.). It ensures that everyone will be treated fairly and justly under the law, regardless of their position or status. To fulfil its intended purpose, the principle must be adaptable while the core principles and values of the rule of law, such as equality before the law, due process, and legal certainty are preserved. All of these objectives are made possible by digital transformation.

The use of digitalization has the potential to play a significant role in advancing the rule of law as a fundamental component of good governance, as is currently being implemented in a number of developed countries. Consider the fact that countries such as South Korea, Estonia, and New Zealand are currently utilising a Single Window of Legal Assistance platform (Khamitovich & Gaptraufovich, 2019). This service is for the purpose of working in a methodical manner with the legal issues that individuals face. Individuals have the ability to obtain online advice, draft and submit a lawsuit, appeal against a fine, and a great deal more through the Single Window platform. In addition, citizens have the ability to submit inquiries on the website of any authority and receive a response within a shorter period of time. At the same time that the legal systems and institutions need to adapt and reform in response to societal developments, the platform can, in general, help make legal aid services more accessible, which will ultimately improve access to justice for individuals who are in need.

The rule of law ought to be taken into consideration during the digital transformation of Malaysia. Citizens would be better able to understand their legal rights and obligations if online platforms were established that made legal documents, court decisions, and government decisions easily accessible to the public. Citizens are presented with the opportunity to advocate for specific causes, initiate and sign petitions, and launch awareness campaigns through the use of digital platforms. This not only encourages a greater level of civic engagement with regard to the fundamentals of the rule of law, but it also makes it possible for the rule of law to be adaptable, which allows it to improve its efficiency and relevance while still maintaining its fundamental principles and priorities.

According to Systems Theory, adaptation refers to the capability of a system to detect changes in its surroundings, to process information regarding these changes, and to make appropriate adjustments to its structure or behaviour in response to these changes. For instance, the digitization of paperwork, the implementation of electronic filing systems, and the expansion of electronic courtrooms are all examples of how digital transformation can help streamline court processes, case management, and administration systems. This automation has the potential to bring about a reduction in delays, an improvement in efficiency, and an overall improvement in the functioning of the judicial system.

Malaysia's digital transform should take the principle rule of law into account. Creating online resources would facilitate and educate the public about their legal rights and responsibilities while improving the efficiency of judicial system. The digital platform also allows for adaptability in order to enhance the efficacy and relevance of the rule of law while upholding its core values and principles for the benefit of Malaysia and its society.

Effectiveness and Efficiency

Effectiveness and efficiency are essential components of good governance because they contribute to the realisation of the goals of government institutions and processes, the provision of services to citizens, and the utilisation of resources in a manner that is both responsible and sustainable (Rahim, 2019). It is expected that the digital transformation will be able to incorporate these principles in a seamless manner by utilising the concept of feedback that is part of Systems Theory.

An example of this would be the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), which is a digital platform that offers a vast amount of statistical information on a variety of subjects, such as the environment, society, economy, and population (Tam & Clarke, 2015). TableBuilder and Census DataPacks are two examples of the platforms and tools that the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) provides to its users in order to facilitate access to and analysis of ABS data for the purposes of research, policy development, and decision-making. The ABS also provides these platforms and tools to its users in order to facilitate this access and analysis. As part of its mission to promote accountability and transparency in the process of public decision-making, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) makes available statistical data that is both objective and easily accessible.

Another example is the Madame la Maire J'ai un idée programme, implemented in France with the purpose of promoting the principle of governance that is based on consensus (Gil et al., 2019). Using this digital platform, residents of Paris are given the opportunity to submit suggestions for ideas and projects that could be implemented within the city, based on thematic tags. It is possible for all of the participants to engage in further conversation, enrichment, and reshaping of these ideas through collaborative efforts. The first campaign that was hosted on the platform was a budget that was open to participation. With this budget, every single Frenchman was able to put forward a project proposal, whether it was for the entire city or for a specific neighbourhood. Voting on the proposed projects, which have a budget of million euros over the course of the entire mayor's mandate, is something that residents of Paris are invited to do on an annual basis.

The principles of good governance, which include effectiveness and efficiency, should also be implemented in Malaysia through a feedback approach. This approach involves the establishment of mechanisms for soliciting, collecting, analysing, and responding to feedback from stakeholders regarding actions, policies, programmes, and services provided by the government. An example of this would be the establishment of multiple channels through which stakeholders can provide feedback. These channels could include online suggestion boxes, hotlines, email addresses, online platforms for public meetings, and surveys. Regularly monitoring, evaluating, and reviewing the performance and effectiveness of feedback mechanisms is one of the most important aspects. This is done to ensure that the mechanisms are relevant, accessible, efficient, and have an impact. In order to identify areas that need

improvement, address gaps, and improve the responsiveness and effectiveness of governance practices, it is important to collect feedback on the feedback process itself.

The ability of government institutions and procedures to accomplish goals, provide services to citizens, and manage resources responsibly and sustainably is made possible by their effectiveness and efficiency, which are essential components of good governance. By using Systems Theory's notion of feedback, the digital transformation ought to be able to smoothly integrate these ideas.

Issues and Challenges

While Malaysia has made great progress in recent years towards digital transformation, relative to some more developed countries, it is still in its early stages. The Malaysian government has been putting numerous initiatives into place to promote digital transformation across a range of industries since it realised how important digitalization is. However, there are a number of issues and challenges with digitalization in Malaysia and these problems have direct impact on incorporating the principles of good governance practices.

One of the significant challenges of digitalization in Malaysia is the digital divide, with disparities in access to digital technologies and the internet among different segments of society (Genus & Nor, 2007). Rural areas in Malaysia often have limited access to high-speed internet connectivity, infrastructure, and digital services compared to urban areas. This disparity hinders residents in rural communities from fully participating in accessing online platforms such as education, telehealth services, and remote work opportunities which may violate the concept of wholeness of Systems Theory.

Concerns regarding cybersecurity risks and data privacy are also heightened by the growing reliance on digital technologies although Malaysia has passed cybersecurity laws like the Computer Crime Act 1997 (Hasan et al., 2023) and the Personal Data Protection Act 2010 (PDPA) (Alibeigi et al., 2021). For instance, phishing attacks, in which cybercriminals trick people into disclosing personal information, login credentials, or making fraudulent payments, are a prevalent cybersecurity threat in Malaysia. Financial losses, identity theft, and data breaches are all possible outcomes of these attacks. Cyberattacks are becoming more frequent and pose serious risks to Malaysian citizens, companies, and government organisations. Promoting the Rule of Law will therefore be difficult because most parties will be reluctant to share data.

Interoperability and data integration are also contributing issues and challenges in digitalization in Malaysia. Many organizations still rely on legacy systems such as Relational Database Architecture that may not be too compatible with modern technology platforms or cloud-based solutions (Bakar et al., 2021). Integration with legacy systems can be complex and time-consuming, requiring careful planning and execution. Many organizations are also using a variety of software systems and platforms across different departments, leading to data silos and lack of integration between systems. The problems of integration also made it difficult to establish a systematic feedback system although the system is essential in applying Systems Theory. These complications made those institutions or agencies could not fulfil the principles of effectiveness and efficiency in good governance accordingly.

Although technical know-how and digital skills are in high demand in Malaysia, there is still a sizable skills gap in fields like artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and data analytics (Ahsan & Ayub, n.d.). One example is the lack of professionals with knowledge of data science and analytics, which are essential for drawing conclusions from data, coming to wise decisions, spurring innovation through adaptation processes. The adoption of data-driven strategies is impeded by this skill gap, which also restricts the potential of digital transformation initiatives. The nation's capacity to fully utilise digital technologies and innovate in the digital space is hampered by a shortage of qualified professionals, which has a significant influence on the principle of effectiveness and efficiency.

Addressing the Challenges and Issues

For a country to prosper in the digital era, digitalization is necessary because it facilitates efficient government, stimulates economic expansion, and creates affluent communities. A coordinated and all-encompassing strategy involving government agencies, civil society organisations, the private sector, and other stakeholders is needed to address the issues and challenge facing Malaysia's efforts to use the nation digitalisation as a tool to promotes good governance practices based on the Systems Theory.

Working with local stakeholders, non-profit organisations, and community organisations to address the unique needs of underserved populations is one strategy to address the issue of the digital divide. In order to provide access to digital resources, this can entail community outreach programmes, digital inclusion initiatives, and collaborations with nearby libraries, community centres, and schools. It is also necessary to offer education and training programmes to assist people in developing their digital literacy and navigating the digital world. This can entail providing community-based training programmes, online classes, and workshops to teach fundamental digital skills like internet browsing, online safety, and tool usage.

While several acts have been enacted to mitigate cybersecurity threats, more efforts are needed such as cybersecurity education and awareness programs. Malaysia should focus on cybersecurity education and awareness through programs which provides resources, tips, and advice to help individuals and businesses improve their cybersecurity practices and protect against online threats. Malaysia also need to enhance cybersecurity collaboration and partnerships with international partners, industry stakeholders, academia, and the private sector to strengthen cybersecurity cooperation, share threat intelligence, and enhance cybersecurity capabilities. Initiatives such as the Joint Cyber Security Centre (JCSC) facilitate public-private collaboration on cybersecurity issues.

Addressing technical know-how and digital skills can be achieved through training and upskilling programs. One approach is by offering training programs, workshops, and courses that focus on technical skills such as programming languages, data analytics, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and other emerging technologies. Another approach is through collaboration with educational institutions to such as universities, colleges, and technical schools to develop curriculum aligned with industry needs. Through activities such as internships, apprenticeships, and mentorship programs to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and real-world technical.

In terms of interoperability and data integration issues and challenge, initiative such as establishment of digital transformation agency drive digital transformation initiatives across government agencies and promote interoperability and data integration. The agency works to develop standards, guidelines, and frameworks for digital services to ensure consistency and compatibility across different government systems. Malaysia can also provide various open data initiatives to promote data sharing and collaboration among government agencies, businesses, and the public.

By adopting the strategies mentioned in addressing the issues and challenges, Malaysia aspiration to improve good governance can be achieved systematically and comprehensively. Nonetheless, continuous monitoring, evaluation and feedback mechanisms need to be established to assess the impact of those digital transformation efforts in ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of the efforts in the long term.

Conclusion

In order to boost overall efficiency, promote economic growth, and improve government services, Malaysia has been aggressively implementing digitalization in a number of sectors. However, even when compared to other developing countries like Indonesia, the accomplishments shown by the good governance index are unsatisfactory. Even though there has been improvement over the last ten years, the difference in gains has been too little. Therefore, in order to raise the performances, an effective and practical strategy are required.

The accelerated expansion of the digital economy is one of the goals of Malaysia's digital transformation plan, which is referred to as MyDigital 2021-2030. To achieve the objective of national prosperity, however, comprehensive transformation initiatives must incorporate all of the principles of good governance. This is necessary in order to have success. When it comes to the implementation of digitalization efforts, it is absolutely necessary to take into consideration Systems Theory for each and every component of the process.

Using the transformative power of digital technologies based on Systems Theory to improve good governance is not without issues and challenges. The digital divide, cybersecurity threats, digital skills, interoperability and data integration are the main concerns. To advance the digitalization of good governance in Malaysia, government agencies, civil society organisations, and the private sector can work together to address these problems and obstacles. It is also crucial to have ongoing monitoring, assessment, and feedback systems in place to evaluate the results of digital governance projects and guarantee their long-term viability and efficacy.

There are still big gaps between Malaysia and others develop nations based on index of good governance. By adopting digital transformation initiatives to include all of the good governance principles as required by Systems Theory concepts, Malaysia has the potential to considerably close various gaps, resulting in a more prosperous country and society. If Malaysia doesn't take advantage of this chance, it might fall behind even with other developing nations in the region.

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